

CIA Opened Mail Of Humphrey, Nixon, Kennedy

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By George Lardner Jr.
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The Central Intelligence Agency illegally opened the mail of "selected American politicians," including Richard Nixon, Edward Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey, as part of its 20-year mail intercept program, it was disclosed yesterday.

The chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, Frank Church (D-Idaho), said investigators even found a letter he wrote to his mother-in-law in the CIA's files.

Church made the disclosures at a fast-moving committee hearing that began with testimony from retired CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton and ended with a renewed move to call Nixon as a witness.

The 11-member committee agreed later at a closed-door meeting that the ex-President's testimony was "needed" on a wide range of issues raised by Senate investigation of government intelligence agencies. The committee's chief counsel, Fritz Schwarz, was told to begin negotiations with Nixon's attorneys in hopes of securing his appearance without a subpoena.

Church said the committee agreed that

Nixon would be "the best witness" on a number of points, including the background of the so-called Huston plan that urged presidential approval of a wide range of illicit domestic activities, including mail intercepts.

Decrying the CIA's "lack of accountability," Church emphasized again yesterday that its program of intercepting all mail to and from the Soviet Union began around 1952, long before White House approval was sought and ended only in 1973, almost three years after the Huston plan was presumed dead.

Working from a "Watch List" which reportedly contained as many as 1,300 names, CIA officers in New York photographed many of the letters, put the originals back into the mail stream, and had the copies sent to CIA headquarters here.

Church said the CIA evidently strayed from the "Watch List" repeatedly and opened the mail of many prominent American citizens and institutions that had not even been targeted for surveillance.

In addition to his own and Nixon's mail, Church said, this included correspondence to or from the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Jay Rockefeller; Sens. Humphrey and Edward

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Kennedy; Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.), and Federal Reserve Board chairman Arthur F. Burns.

Mail belonging to Harvard University, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation was also secretly opened, Church said. Committee aides said much of it was found in a special CIA file set aside for correspondence to and from "selected American politicians."

Church said it included a June, 1968, letter written by Nixon speechwriter Ray Price in Moscow and addressed to Nixon at his New York law firm while he was campaigning for the presidency.

The letter Church sent, during a trip to the Soviet Union, was addressed to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Chase Clark, in Boise in 1971.

Angleton, who directed the mail intercept program from 1955 to 1973, readily acknowledged that it was illegal, but repeatedly defended it as vital to national security.

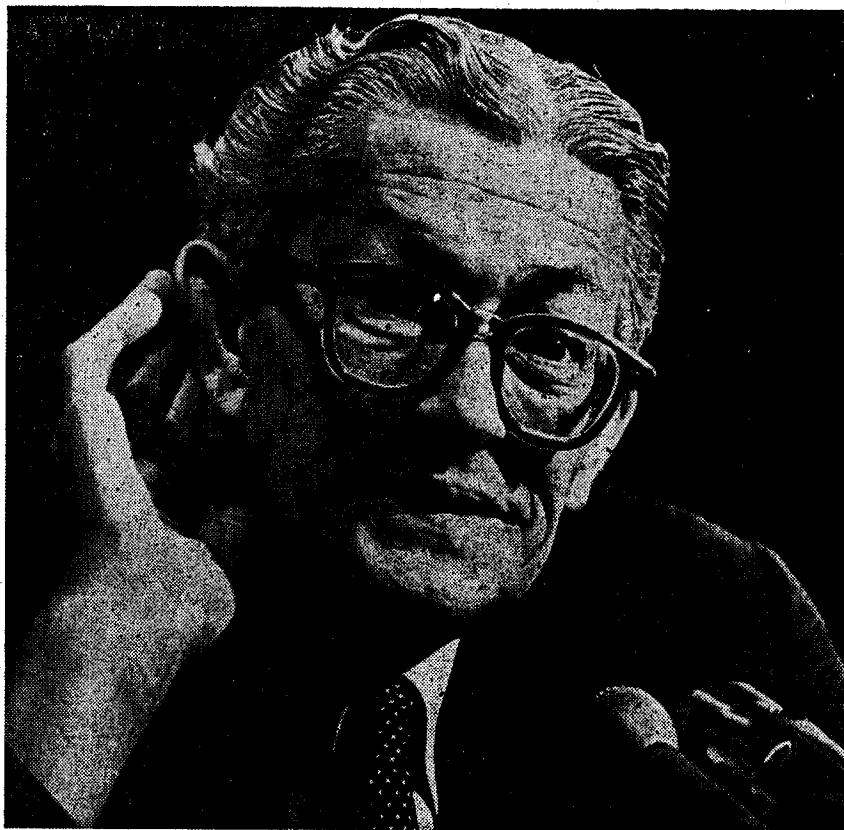
"From a counterintelligence point of view, it was vitally important to know everything possible about contacts between U.S. citizens and Communist countries," Angleton maintained.

Angleton repeatedly protested that "the nature of the threat" posed by the Soviet Union was not sufficiently appreciated these days.

"When I look at the map today and see the weakness of power of this country, that is what shocks me," he told the committee.

Sen. Robert Morgan (D-N.C.) replied that what shocked him was the violation of individual rights that the mail opening project represented.

Angleton also was taken to task over testimony he gave at a closed session of the committee on Sept. 12, when he said



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Former CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton testifying.

he found it "inconceivable that a secret intelligence arm of the government has to comply with all the overt orders of the government."

Challenged by one senator after another about the remark, Angleton called himself "rather imprudent" for having said it, but refused to say that he didn't mean it.

In testimony before the committee Tuesday, former White House aide Tom

Charles Huston, who presided over the drafting of the controversial 1970 plan for stepped-up domestic spying, protested that so far as he was aware, neither he nor President Nixon knew that some of the illegal activities proposed in the plan—such as the mail opening by the CIA—had been going on for years.

Huston derided the notion that he had been some sort of spy-agency czar at the

White House, leaving the impression that he had not been very knowledgeable about the intelligence community's closely held secrets.

Angleton crisply suggested yesterday that the senators should have questioned Huston more closely, especially about what he learned as a protégé of former Assistant FBI Director William Sullivan, who had been in charge of the bureau's domestic intelligence operations.

"I would suggest Mr. Huston was much better educated when he embarked on these matters than his testimony suggests," the CIA veteran said drily. He said Huston was supposed to be "the ultimate authority for domestic security," comparable to Henry Kissinger in foreign affairs.

In the same vein, Angleton readily agreed that President Nixon exerted heavy pressure on the intelligence community to step up its domestic spywork in the face of antiwar protests and bombings in 1969 and 1970. Sen. Walter Mondale (D-Minn.) said that a "talking paper" given Nixon to use at a June 5, 1970, meeting with top intelligence officials showed a deep "distrust of the American people."

Prepared by Huston, the paper asserted that "hundreds, perhaps thousands of Americans—mostly under 30—are determined to destroy our society," and that their elders, particularly in the media and the academic community, were unwilling to believe it.

Mondale charged that the document showed "an enormous, unrestricted paranoid fear of the American people." Instead of concluding that "we had a bad war that had to be stopped," he complained, the Nixon White House chose instead to "suspect people and say we need more counterintelligence."

Angleton disagreed. "It is not, in my view, paranoia," he said.